



STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

A Memo from the New Jersey Department of Education

Date: March 12, 2025
To: Local Educational Agency Leads
Route To: District Directors of Special Education, All District Principals, Assistant/Vice Principals, Special Education Teachers, Child Study Team Members
From: Kathy Ehling, Assistant Commissioner
Division of Educational Services

Changes to Eligibility Categories for Participation in the Alternate Assessment, Effective Spring 2026

All students, including students with disabilities, must take statewide assessments. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) allows for the use of alternate assessments based on alternate achievement standards for students with the most significant intellectual disabilities. Students with the most significant intellectual disabilities who meet the participation criteria will be administered the Dynamic Learning Maps (DLM) alternate assessment. Effective for the Spring 2026 assessment, revisions have been made to the eligibility criteria for students with disabilities participating in the alternate assessment. These changes are designed to ensure that only students with the most significant intellectual disabilities participate in the alternate assessment.

The DLM is designed for students with the most significant intellectual disabilities for whom general state assessments are not appropriate, even with accommodations. The DLM offers these students a way to show what they know and can do in English language arts, mathematics and science. The DLM also helps educators and parents set high academic expectations for students with the most significant intellectual disabilities. Results from the DLM are used to inform specialized instruction and meet accountability requirements for reporting student achievement.

As the DLM is appropriate only for students with significant intellectual disabilities, beginning with the **Spring 2026 Administration**, students eligible for special education and related services under the eligibility categories of specific learning disability (SLD), emotional regulation impairment (ERI), auditorily impaired, orthopedic impairment, and speech or language impairment are **not eligible** to participate in the DLM assessment. These students must instead be administered the New Jersey Student Learning Assessment (NJSLA) or New Jersey Graduation Proficiency Assessment (NJGPA), with appropriate accommodations and accessibility features.

This change aligns with Sections 34 CFR 300.309(a)(3)(i) and (ii) and 300.8(c)(4)(i) of the IDEA's implementing regulations, which require that intellectual factors or impairments be ruled out in order for a student to qualify for special education services under the categories of specific learning disability (SLD) or emotional regulation impairment (ERI). Additionally, the categories of auditorily impaired, orthopedic impairment, and speech or language impairment do not have an intellectual factor or impairment associated with them. Therefore, students that fall under these eligibility categories are not eligible for the DLM.

Students who are eligible for special education under the following eligibility categories may be eligible to participate in the DLM assessment:

- Autism
- Deaf/Blindness
- Intellectual Disability
- Multiple Disabilities
- Traumatic Brain Injury
- Visual Impairment
- Social Maladjustment
- Other Health Impairment
- Communication Impairment
- Deafness/Hearing Impairment

The DLM participation criteria for the 2025-2026 school year has been revised and is available on [the New Jersey Dynamic Learning Maps Resources](#) website. The [DLM Participation Criteria Updates webinar](#) offers a detailed overview of the revised eligibility categories, provides comprehensive explanations of the changes, and thoroughly reviews the participation criteria in its entirety. This webinar is designed to ensure that all professionals involved in determining participation in the alternate assessment, including child study team members, district test coordinators, special education directors, teachers, administrators, and other relevant staff, have access to the information needed for an appropriate determination. We strongly encourage all relevant staff to review the presentation.

For more information or for questions regarding the alternate assessment, please contact the Office of Special Education at AAParticipation@doe.nj.gov

c: Members, State Board of Education
NJDOE Staff
Statewide Parent Advocacy Network
Garden State Coalition of Schools
NJ LEE Group